

fruitcake

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Fruitcake

Dried fruit soaked in spirits, folded into a small amount of dark spiced batter, baked very low for hours, and then fed with more spirit over weeks or months. It is the oldest cake in this folder by centuries and the most misunderstood: a properly made fruitcake is 60–70% fruit by weight and keeps for years, because sugar and alcohol between them leave nothing for a microbe to work with.

What makes it work

- **Soak the fruit for at least 24 hours, ideally a week.** Dried fruit dropped into a batter dry will steal water from the crumb and bake into gravel. See [Dried Fruit](#).
- **The batter is a binder, not a cake.** Roughly a third of the total weight. Too much and it is a spice cake with raisins in it.
- **Very low and very slow: 140 °C for three to four hours.** Wrap the tin in brown paper and stand it on a folded newspaper or a baking sheet — the outside will burn long before the middle sets otherwise.
- **Feed it.** A tablespoon of brandy, rum or whisky spooned over every week or two for one to three months. The alcohol both preserves and matures it.
- **Line the tin twice**, base and sides, with a paper collar standing above the rim.

Ingredients

One 20 cm round. Serves 20 — it is cut thin.

Fruit, soaked:

- 350 g raisins
- 250 g sultanas
- 200 g currants
- 150 g glacé cherries, halved — see [Cherry](#)
- 100 g mixed candied peel
- 100 g dried [apricots](#), chopped
- 150 ml brandy, dark rum or whisky
- zest and juice of 1 orange and 1 [lemon](#)

Batter:

- 250 g unsalted butter, softened
- 250 g dark brown sugar
- 5 [eggs](#)
- 300 g all-purpose flour
- 5 g fine salt
- 8 g ground mixed spice
- 4 g ground [cinnamon](#)
- 2 g [nutmeg](#)
- 2 tbsp [molasses](#) or black treacle
- 150 g [almonds](#) or [walnuts](#), chopped

Method

Combine all the fruit with the spirit and the zest and juice. Cover and leave at least 24 hours, stirring when you pass.

Heat the oven to **140 °C / 275 °F**. Double-line a 20 cm tin with parchment standing 5 cm proud, and tie a band of brown paper round the outside.

Cream the butter and sugar four minutes. Beat in the eggs one at a time with a spoonful of the flour each. Mix in the treacle.

Fold in the flour, salt and spices, then the soaked fruit with all its liquid, then the nuts.

Scrape into the tin, level, and make a slight dip in the centre. Bake **3 to 3½ hours**, until a skewer comes out clean. Cover the top with foil if it darkens early.

Cool completely in the tin. Pierce all over with a skewer and spoon over 2 tbsp of spirit. Wrap in parchment then foil, and feed with a tablespoon every week or two.

Notes

- **Marzipan and royal icing** go on a week before serving, over a thin layer of warm apricot jam.
- **It keeps for years**, genuinely — a well-fed fruitcake at 12 months is better than at three. Store cool and dark, wrapped, never in plastic alone.
- The non-alcoholic version soaks the fruit in strong tea or apple juice and keeps two months rather than two years.

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